
Some Questions on Three Cooperative Projects

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MOST IDEAS ON library cooperation can be traced back a long way, and one could chronicle years of practical experience with exchanges, inter-library lending, and bibliographical enterprises of many sorts including cooperative cataloguing.¹⁻³ The three projects to be considered here embody suggestions of considerable antiquity, but Farmington Plan books have been coming to the country for only four years, the Midwest Inter-Library Center opened its doors during 1951, and the Northeastern Regional Library is still only a proposal. In the hope that an attempt to look objectively at the dangers ahead may benefit such youthful undertakings, this article—unlike the traditionally optimistic treatments of cooperation that stress past successes and future opportunities rather than failures or difficulties—will devote itself to questions.

Both the Farmington Plan and the movement toward central libraries assume that the major research collections ought to coordinate their efforts better than they have done in the past; both are attempts to add to total resources and to reduce the duplication of infrequently used materials. These objectives and the assumptions on which they are based will not be questioned; a librarian who does question them may find his doubts productive only of frustration if he can neither abolish areas of instruction and research nor hope to acquire everything that some present or future member of his faculty might want.

The Farmington Plan began on a small scale in 1948 without a capital investment; even a modest launching would have been much more difficult if there had not already been a Union Catalog in Washington and a well-established system of inter-library loan supplemented by photographic reproduction. Though it now brings books to American Chief of the Acquisition Department, Harvard College Library.

Some Questions on Threc Cooperative Projects

can libraries from seventeen countries * instead of from the original three, it is still an infant in size compared to what it might become. It does not cover serials, public documents, materials not in the book trade, juvenile literature, music scores, pre-college textbooks, sheet maps, theses, or translations from one modern language into another.⁴⁻⁶

A library that participates in the plan must spend a certain amount of its book funds, and, inevitably, of its funds for processing and storage, on publications it would not have selected had it been buying solely on the basis of present and potential needs of its own community. Just how much the plan is costing any institution would be very difficult to determine. One would have to ascertain which of the books that come on Farmington would not be bought otherwise—perhaps very few of those dealing with subjects in which the library is particularly interested. Even if no deductions of this sort are taken into account, the present costs may not seem intimidating; during 1951 the participating libraries spent approximately \$34,000 for the 17,000 volumes supplied to them under the Farmington Plan, but their total expenditures for books, periodicals, and binding came to more than eight million dollars that year. Illinois, receiving more Farmington books than any other library, spent \$4,400 for them; Harvard, which was in second place in 1951 and may be first during 1952 when it will cover law from seventeen countries instead of only five, spent about \$3,550; the New York Public Library, Yale, Columbia, Chicago, New York University, Minnesota, Catholic University, and Purdue spent more than one thousand dollars each; eight others spent between five hundred and one thousand dollars each; twenty libraries spent between one hundred and five hundred dollars each; and the remaining sixteen spent less than one hundred dollars each. Only Catholic University spent more than two per cent of its total book funds for Farmington purchases; the figures for Illinois, New York University, Brown, Dartmouth, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology were more than one but less than one and one-half per cent; and Farmington receipts accounted for less than one per cent of the amount spent by each of the other forty-eight participants on books, periodicals, and binding.

Extension of the plan ought to produce more alarming figures eventually, but it can be argued that the largest libraries, buying for

* The countries now covered are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

potential needs, must do a good deal of selection by guesswork, and suffer little from a reduction in the funds available for wagering on obscure titles that seem promising. The plan's supporters are convinced, of course, that scholars and libraries of the nation as a whole will be better off if one copy of each current publication is brought to the country and individual bets are made only with the money left after this has been done. At best, however, such arguments may prove only that the project ought to be undertaken by someone, not that a specific library will benefit because it participates instead of letting others do the job. An individual may be convinced that the Army is essential, yet doubt that it would do him good to enlist.

Since there is no selective service law behind the plan, any participating library may be asked difficult questions. A member of the faculty may want to know why a collection cannot be bought for his use when the library is spending money for "marginal" material that admittedly is likely, if ever used, to be wanted by a scholar from some other campus. Prospective donors or those who authorize budgets may ask why, in view of the same circumstances, more funds ought to be provided for books or other library purposes. The questioner may not be silenced completely by a reply that the library ought to do its share in furthering a good cause and that Farmington purchases take a small percentage of a great library's budget; a great library will already be lending many more books than it borrows and serving numerous visiting scholars from less fortunate institutions. Then why, the critic may ask, should it, rather than libraries that are already indebted to it, have volunteered to assume Farmington responsibilities? It might seem reasonable to ask such questions even if Farmington books were given to libraries, since money is required to process, store, and lend them.

The plan has operated independently of central libraries, which could be established if there were no Farmington Plan. If both plan and central libraries are to exist, however, it is natural to propose that infrequently used materials acquired under the plan be forwarded directly to institutions created to house such material. If it is cheaper to store books at a center than at home—and it surely ought to be cheaper if the central library's building is a gift—then any Farmington Plan library ought to be able to save money by having some of its receipts under the plan go directly to the center. Yet this procedure might not make it easier to answer questions of the sort suggested above; a professor or an appropriating body might find it very hard

Some Questions on Three Cooperative Projects

to understand why the library spends money on books that do not even come to it, but go to an institution miles away and nearer to other communities of scholars than to its own.

Up to now, the Farmington Plan has called on libraries to buy some relatively obscure books and let outsiders use them. Great libraries have been used to doing this, but the plan required explicit promises, which they had not made before. It will be a still more distinct break with tradition if libraries start to buy for a geographically separate institution, and will deprive participants of most of the prestige that comes from maintaining an outstanding—even though rarely used—collection in any subject.

Perhaps one ought not to assume that tradition, the emotions, and other seemingly extra-logical considerations have no bearing on the problem. Has any sponsor of central libraries been so unrealistic as to propose that rare book collections be consolidated? There may be rational grounds for the suggestion, particularly at a time when some librarians are thinking of shipping many of their rarely used treasures to non-metropolitan locations where they would be relatively safe from air raids; one could argue that selling the duplicates from a bibliographical Fort Knox might help to solve a few financial problems. The fact that such a proposal is unthinkable may support the theory that budgets and research needs are not the only factors determining the limits of library cooperation.

The new Midwest Inter-Library Center and the proposed Northeastern Regional Library have been referred to as central libraries, but that term may need some explanation. There seems to be general agreement that the New England Deposit Library, at least so long as it remains only a cooperatively financed warehouse, will not qualify for membership in the new species. A central library must normally eliminate duplicates when multiple copies of any work are deposited, and the remaining copy must either become the property of the center or be deposited there permanently; otherwise a member would have no assurance that a copy of each book that is contributed will always be available for use when needed. A true central library, it is also agreed, must have an acquisition program of its own, for, as noted apropos of the Farmington Plan, it would obviously be uneconomical to require that infrequently used material new to the region pass first through the hands of a member institution.

Achievements and hopes of the Midwest Inter-Library Center have been described in its monthly *Newsletter*⁷ and in a number of recent

articles by its director, R. T. Esterquest. Whatever further activities the new institution may decide to undertake later on, acquisition and storage of jointly owned materials may fairly be called the basic ones, for an office—or a bibliographical center of the sort established at Philadelphia, Seattle, or Denver—could operate an inter-library communication system and the centralized acquisition and cataloguing plans that have been proposed; these do not presuppose a great inter-library book collection housed in its own building.

The Midwest center is off to a good start, with foundation grants totalling one million dollars to pay for a building that will hold more than 2,500,000 volumes and to cover some of the costs of organization. Assessments to support operations for the fiscal year 1950-51 had to raise only \$30,000; they were based on book budgets, the number of doctorates granted annually, and proximity to Chicago.⁸ The largest assessment, paid by the University of Chicago, was \$4,700.64. Prospective increases can hardly be estimated until it has been decided what the center will undertake to do. At least, however, if it seems reasonable to doubt that the members would have paid for the building themselves, it may follow that a problem will arise when the original storage capacity is exhausted and funds must be obtained for a second unit. Even now the objection can be made that, if any library chose to give its infrequently used materials to the center but not to join, it could obtain most of the benefits of membership without paying the annual assessments.

This, of course, raises pretty much the same problem of fairness versus contributions to the general welfare that has been treated as a Farmington Plan question. Fees for use of the center by non-members (or for use of Farmington Plan books by non-participating libraries) might seem to offer a solution, but they would create serious complications. If, like the charges libraries make for photostats and microfilms, they merely covered some of the direct costs of a transaction, they would by no means suffice to make non-members pay their share; equity would demand fees so large that they would be a real hardship for the scholar. Moreover, if material on the shelves of member libraries can be consulted by visitors or borrowed by other libraries without charge, it would seem illogical to make outsiders pay for the use of those holdings that happen to have been transferred to Chicago. If the citizens of a state have traditionally been entitled to free use of books in the library of the state university, they may reasonably expect also to borrow without charge books in a center of which the state uni-

Some Questions on Three Cooperative Projects

versity is a proprietor. Since a majority of the members are state institutions, taxes ultimately must provide most of the center's funds. Though it undoubtedly would have been much more difficult to arrange, it might have been more logical for the states directly—instead of through their universities—to have established the center as a library for all scholars of the area and, since midwestern scholars call on libraries in other regions, of the country.

The leading members of a Northeastern Regional Library would be privately endowed institutions. One can argue that it would be as reasonable for them to charge fees for use of their library resources as to charge tuition for the instruction they give; likewise, since they spend more on each student than they collect from him, such fees need not be set at prohibitive levels based on full cost-accounting. There are always some books too fragile, valuable, or popular to be sent away on loan, and libraries in large metropolitan centers sometimes find fees or other restrictions necessary to prevent outsiders from making such heavy use of the library as to interfere seriously with its use by members of the institution. Subject to minor reservations like these, however, scholars have traditionally been entitled to visit libraries and borrow from them free of charge; the tradition may be illogical, but abandonment of it might be a grave mistake. A university that has been given millions of dollars for its libraries cannot fail to appear meanly selfish when it first starts to charge for each visit by a non-affiliated scholar or for each volume it lends him. Such a library hopes, of course, to receive more millions from its generous friends, and must consider the effect of its fees on these potential gifts. Any fees, essentially, will penalize institutions that have smaller libraries because they have been less successful in attracting gifts. This is fair enough from one point of view, but adoption of that point of view would make it very hard for a library to justify its participation in the Farmington Plan or a central library.

Perhaps questions of equity have been absurdly overemphasized here; few projects could be undertaken if one had first to make sure that there would be a perfectly fair apportionment of burdens and benefits. Rationing and community funds can succeed in spite of black markets and avarice; the danger they face is that non-cooperation may become contagious if too many persons ask, "Others are getting meat, why shouldn't I? Others give nothing, why should I give?" Perhaps so few librarians and other university officials will be guilty of this attitude that the perils suggested above are wholly imaginary.

It is to the credit of the Midwest center if its example has led many librarians to assume that anything done in the Northeast ought to be along the same lines.^{9, 10} Nevertheless, a paper devoted to questions should try to suggest reasons for doubting that assumption.

In the first place, if no money should come to the northeasterners from an outside source, or if they should be given money to be used for any purpose they might wish, are they sure they would want to erect a building? An inter-library office, it has been pointed out, might be able to handle the cooperative acquisition and processing work that has been proposed in the Midwest. It is also possible that the northeastern libraries could agree to send all their infrequently used public documents to one member of the group, all old textbooks to another, and so on. Each would need to provide for inexpensive storage, but this might be done individually or through local institutions like the New England Deposit Library as cheaply as in a regional center. Is the question of a building fundamentally one of fund-raising strategy, or is it easier for libraries to relinquish books to a center than to one another? If a building can be obtained by gift, it will almost certainly be accepted, and perhaps funds can be raised for a building more easily than for anything else, yet the same theory might be used in arguing that it would be easier for members to finance their own individual storage buildings than to pay for other features of a cooperative program. Likewise, if the advocate of a center asserts that it is easier, because of traditional and human factors, to give material to a center than to a rival library, his opponent may reply that the same factors make it easier to pay for the storage of infrequently used material if it is individually, instead of collectively, owned and housed.

A second series of questions might begin with this: Is it a sound assumption that the country's second central library ought to be a regional one? Regardless of the sources of its support, if a super-library is built up by the New York Public Library, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Cornell, and their neighbors, it must inevitably serve scholars nationally, for it will contain a great many books that are to be found nowhere else in the United States. If it is to be explicitly national in character, one can hardly fail to think of the possibility of operating the new institution as a part of the Library of Congress. This annex presumably would not be established in Washington; if it were in a rural setting it might include stack space available for rental to rare book collections during periods of insecurity, which promise to continue or recur for some years.

Some Questions on Three Cooperative Projects

If the northeastern project is really national, there is another possibility—so ridiculous, no doubt, that it would occur only to a former Californian who once supposed (and even thought the map backed him up) that Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts were all somewhere off in the northeastern corner of the nation—*viz.*, the northeasterners might consider trying to move in on Chicago's central library.

Distance, of course, may raise fundamental and difficult problems in any cooperative project, though it has been ignored by the Farmington Plan, which provides only that a copy of each book come to a library somewhere in the country. Distance causes trouble because it costs time or money, if not both. In communication by telephone or wireless, time disappears from the picture, and, by the fastest available transportation, two small towns in the same region may be further apart in time than San Francisco and New York; distance does, however, materially affect telephone tolls and the price of tickets. When it comes to first-class mail, on the other hand, three cents will take a message anywhere in the country, but the extra miles may require extra days. Rates for book-post also disregard the postal zones. One can therefore very nearly eliminate the factor of time, even in travel by individuals, if one is willing to pay for doing so; one can get books and messages (but not persons) from one coast to the other as cheaply as from one suburb to the next if one is willing to take the time. Distance is a problem that has grown less serious and that may continue to shrink.

Still, if the pride of individuals in their own institutions must be taken into account when planning cooperative ventures, regional pride may also need to be considered. More great libraries are located near the main railway line from Washington to Boston than exist anywhere else in the hemisphere; the country's second major group of research libraries is the one centered somewhere in the Chicago area. Possibly the Midwest, because it was in second place, found a regional library more attractive than any other section will. The South, the Mountain States, and the Pacific Coast are a little too far behind the Northeast in library resources to rival it for some years to come whatever they do. The midwestern institutions, one might assert, saw an opportunity to catch up by collective action much more quickly than they could have hoped to do separately, and this may have helped to reconcile them to the prospect, as pointed out by Ellsworth and Kilpatrick,¹¹ that their central library would in time overshadow the individual libraries that created it. Perhaps the desire to stay ahead will supply

the Northeast with an adequate incentive; perhaps there is enough regional consciousness and pride there to make it easier for libraries to plan an ostensibly regional rather than admittedly national institution. At least it can be predicted that they will want most of the books that leave their individually owned shelves to remain within a few miles of salt water.

The problem is certainly national, but strategic considerations may, and probably should, determine the next step. If money were available, there could be a discussion of how best to use it; if one plan and only one were obviously desirable, there could be an attempt at least to raise the necessary funds. As it is, however, there are several plans that may be adequate, and good reasons exist for asserting that the best of these to choose is the one that has the best chance of attracting the necessary financial support. The author would be gratified if he could convince even himself that he knows what ought to be done. Instead, unfortunately, he must end with a summary that leads only to a further question.

Summary. Major libraries, some privately endowed and some tax-supported, are trying to increase the country's total resources for research by taking part in the Farmington Plan, which requires a type of sacrifice in behalf of the general welfare somewhat different from the contributions that these libraries have been accustomed to make. Midwestern institutions are supporting an inter-library center that ought to benefit both the region and the nation; it, too, requires them to pay for something that may help others as much as it helps them and, in addition, limits their individual ambitions. Librarians of the Northeast hope to make a comparable attack on the problem of resources and costs; the present holdings of that area are so important that scholarship throughout the country can be directly and quickly affected by what is done there. Those who will have to give up something—the largest libraries—must decide how far they can go, and will no doubt make the plan, but all the research institutions of the country, if they agree that the plan is good, can expect to benefit from it. Need it be assumed that those who will volunteer to give books must also be entirely responsible for obtaining the money?

Some Questions on Three Cooperative Projects

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